SONG IN A STRANGE LAND:

An investigation, in paint, into the music of *Arauco Libre*

by

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Abstract

SONG IN A STRANGE LAND:

an investigation, in paint, into the music of *Arauco Libre*

The central research question underlying this project is 'How to express in visual form, the music of *Arauco Libre* and its role in their migration experience'. The case study in this research is a group of exiles from Chile who formed a popular band, *Arauco Libre,* in Hobart, Tasmania, thirty years ago. Their Andean-inspired music, played on traditional South American instruments, has its roots in folk music, going back for thousands of years, and is entwined with the identity of the people of the Altiplano. In the politically turbulent 1960's and 70's, this music was associated with the aspirations of the indigenous and the poor and the election of the Allende government, but after the military coup which toppled this government, it also came to speak of the experience of exile. The instruments, rich in associations of all these things, are the subject matter in the series of paintings that are the outcome of this research.

The nine still life paintings of these unique instruments are quasi-portraits of their owners. Using the device of hanging the instruments from trees, I reference the poetic trope of exiles from Psalm 137: '*we hung our harps on the willows'*. This suspension of the instruments engages the migrant narrative at a moment of in-between, of not belonging, of leaving the past and facing an unknown future. The images explore the tension between nostalgia for a past homeland and hope for a better life. These dualities are expressed in the use of darkness and light. Along with the void and the

raking light, these metaphors combine in a redemptive visual allegory of hope and human endeavour.

In a series of interviews band members gave insights into both their music and their migration story. Literature about music in society, and Andean society in particular, provided an undergirding of the project. Among the still life artists that have directly informed my work are Juan Sanchez Cotan, Francisco de Zurbaran, Adriaen Coorte, and Harmen Steenwyk. I also refer to painters of musical instruments, Evaristo Baschinas and Raoul Dufy. Chosen works of twenty first century painters, Cindy Wright and Teresa Fischer, demonstrate how the still life genre can be invested with contemporary meaning while the work of contemporary photographer Joachim Froese is seminal, with his strategy of suspending objects, exposing their vulnerability.

The project celebrates and examines a small but significant part of Tasmanian history. Positioned at the intersection of the sister arts of music and painting, the research explores the significance of Andean-inspired music in the cross-cultural setting of Hobart by interpreting this specific case and seeks to repurpose the still life genre to communicate the nature of the migrant experience that it evokes.

INTRODUCTION

A group of political exiles arrived in Hobart from Chile in 1987. Before long some of them formed a band, *Arauco Libre*, playing Andean-inspired music, which became a regular and popular part of Hobart's Salamanca Market on a Saturday morning. Their story is the subject of my practice-led research, which investigates '*How to express in visual form, the music of Arauco Libre and its role in their migration experience'*.

Why did I choose this topic?

When the Chilean refugees arrived in Hobart, the paths of some of them inadvertently crossed with mine. They had no English and I no Spanish yet we connected and friendships remain to this day. Last year, the thirtieth anniversary of their arrival in Hobart and the formation of the band, coincided with my enrolment in the Master's programme. I felt that their story should not be lost and my study presented an opportunity to investigate it through the medium of paint. It is then, as an outsider, a sympathetic observer, that I try to articulate visually an appreciation of their journey.

To express in paint the experience of someone else could be construed as not authentic or presumptuous, even arrogant. However, the capacity to empathise, to walk in someone else's shoes, is not to be diminished. The celebrated young French philosopher and novelist, Tristan Garcia, has an interesting view on this, one that I find convincing and encouraging. He says in an interview in *Bomb* magazine (Laugier 2011):

> For a time, it was believed that because people were writing to tell their stories—as if to a psychoanalyst or a confessor—literature was self-expression, first and foremost, and, sometimes, the fictional expression of self: speech, a voice, the voice of the person writing. For me, it is the contrary. Writing is a refined form of empathy through which man extends his ability to be an 'Other', to feel what someone else feels, to trade his sensibility and voice with others without losing his soul. A novel is a tool for knowledge, like any other great art: what one seeks to know is something other than oneself.

Surely painting too can be 'a refined form of empathy' and can legitimately convey the narrative of others. I am neither musician nor Marxist; I am Australian not South

American; I have not been through the violence of a military coup or belong to an oppressed family. Yet I believe that as an outsider, a listener with no agenda, an observer, a researcher, I can have an empathetic point of view. Proceeding with sensitivity, my engagement with the research question has been personally enriching.

Addressing the research question

I commenced my research by exploring three areas. They were the Andean-inspired music itself, the band's unique instruments, and the poetics of performance. It became apparent that this was too broad a scope, so I chose to focus on the instruments, narrowing the question to *how can the genre of still life express the music of Arauco Libre and its role in their migration experience?*

This proved to be a good decision because I found that the instruments, transported from South America, function in the images as quasi-portraits for their exiled owners. It was the unique sounds of these exotic instruments that captured the ears of the crowds who, week after week, gathered to listen to them in Salamanca Place. These instrumental voices were the means of conveying the message of the band when its Spanish-speaking members could speak no English. As one said, 'Music was our second language' (M Duarte 2017, pers.comm 24 May). Their simple folk instruments, symbols and carriers of a culture that goes back for millennia, became, appropriately, the subject of my studio-led research, the outcome of which is a suite of still life paintings that portray them individually, but that are intended to be read as an ensemble.

In Chapter one, *Music and Migration,* I summarise the concepts that underpin the project including the role of music in migration and the story of the band, its exile and integration into Tasmania, along with excerpts from my interviews with band members. I discuss allegory and musical instruments in art, the migrant narrative and the intersection of painting and music where this project is situated.

In Chapter two, *Artists of Significance,* I review the works of artists that have informed my work. All exponents of the Still Life genre, they extend from Spanish and Dutch masters of the seventeenth century to current practitioners. The formal characteristics and the symbolic and allegorical concepts of their works are discussed from the point of view of my project. In Chapter three, *The Studio Journey,* I recount the way my methodology of still life, allegory, migrant narrative and duality led to the suite of

nine paintings. I record how the discovery of a poetic trope of exile, *we hung our harps on the willows,* changed the direction of my research.

The conclusion comprises an assessment of how successfully the question was resolved, what contribution the work makes to the field and an appraisal of the worthwhileness of the project.

Chapter 1 MUSIC AND MIGRATION

> Change, everything changes
> But my love doesn't change
> No matter how far away I am
> Nor the memory nor the pain
> of my place and of my people

From the song *Todo Cambia* by Julio Numhauser of the *Quilapayun* band

In this chapter I canvass the ideas that underpin this studio-led research: how music is fundamental to human society; the character of Andean-inspired music and its instruments; music and politics; music and refugees; the exile of Tasmania's Chilean community, and the formation and development of the *Arauco Libre* band. I share their migrant story as told to me in interviews. This leads into a discussion on music and migration, the musical instruments, still life allegory, cultural sensitivity, the trope of exile and the intersection between the sister arts of music and painting, where this project sits.

Music and society

Looking at all the societies and cultures known to man, including those of the past, it can readily be seen that the role of music in human society is very important (Garfias 2004). Music and dance are central to ritual, courtship and identity (Tarr 2014, p1) and 'the more we use music to bring us together the more potential there is for increased empathy, social connection, and co-operation' (Suttie 2015). Among the Inca people of South America, music was a vital means of communication especially because their language, Quechua, was not a written language prior to the coming of the Spanish (Thomson 2015). 'There is an inbuilt quality in their music to carry a message' says Germán

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Duarte of *Arauco Libre*. The indigenous people of the Andean region, over a long history, developed their own unique instruments of communication. (G Duarte 2017, pers.comm., 8 June).

Music and Politics

Music has played a critical role in the politics of the Chilean people since the mid twentieth century. The singer/songwriter and visual artist, Violeta Para (1917-1967), became a driving force in the *Nueva Canción* (new song) movement of Chile in the early '60s, researching, reviving and adapting indigenous music to contemporary ears. 'Her Andean-infused folk songs were highly political and nationalistic in their lyrical as well as melodic content.' (Cunningham 2011). Also prominent in reviving this music was Victor Jara. This charismatic music legend was active in the election of the Allende government. As Salvadore Allende, the new president-elect, took the stage to greet cheering citizens following the 1970 elections, a banner above his head read, 'You Can't Have a Revolution Without Songs' (Folkways 2018).

However, there were no songs on September 11, 1973, when a bloody *coup d'état* took place. The forces of the Chilean army, led by General Augusto Pinochet, over-threw the socialist government of President Allende who died that day (Allende 2013). There is conjecture as to whether he was murdered or took his own life. The new regime closed down the National Congress, burned the voter registration rolls (Washington Post 2000) and empowered the feared secret police, the DINA, (National Intelligence Directorate). During the seventeen years of Pinochet's regime of fear and intimidation, more than three thousand two hundred people were executed or disappeared, and scores of thousands more were detained and tortured (Kendall 2006). Over two hundred thousand

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Chileans, roughly two per cent of Chile's 1973 population, were exiled to all parts of the world, including Hobart (Wright 2007).

When Pinochet seized power, a period in Chilean history referred to as the *Apagón Cultural* - the Cultural Blackout - ensued. (Pivet-Marsh 2016). The music of the *Nueva Canción* was outlawed and the use of certain indigenous instruments, perceived as too closely identified with the movement's songs, was prohibited (Morris 1984, p12). The day after the coup, Jara was detained with many others at the Santiago sports ground. He was tortured, his guitar-playing hands were crushed and eventually he was shot. Forty-four bullet wounds were found in his body (Cunningham 2011).

Three eloquent images

Three images eloquently convey some of the pathos surrounding the military coup. The sculpture, *Allende Glasses* (fig. 1) by Chilean artist Carlos Altamirano (2008), monumentalises part of the broken trademark glasses of former

Fig. 1, Carlos Altamirano, *Allende Glasses,* 2008, sculpture scale 50:1

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President Allende, found after his death on the day of the coup, when armed forces stormed the palace. Encapsulating the shattered vision of an idealist, this artwork dramatically illustrates the power of an object to convey meaning and emotion.

The second is a painting by Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamín (fig. 2), *Tears of Blood* (1973). The image honours Allende but also a musician, Victor Jara and a poet, Pablo Neruda (Nobelprize.org, 2014) who died in suspicious circumstances not long after the coup. The contorted hands reference the smashing of the hands of the guitarist Jara before he was murdered (Cunningham 2011).

Fig. 2, Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Tears of Blood: Homage to Salvador Allende, Victor Jara, and Pablo Neruda*, 1973, oil on canvas

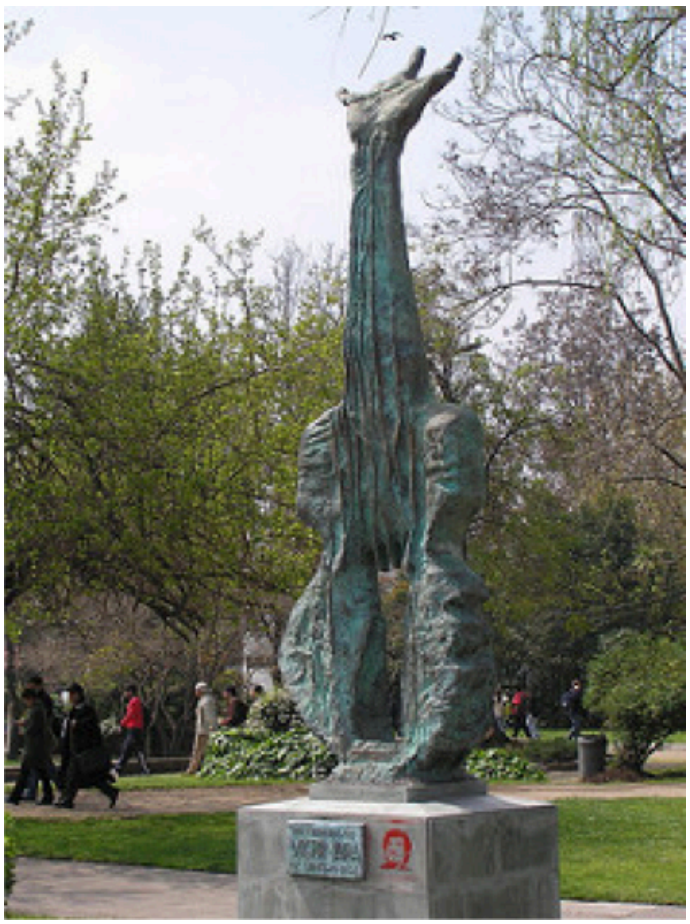

Fig. 3, Lautaro Diaz Silva, 1998, *Jara Memorial,* brass, 3 m high, Santiago University

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The third is a sculpture, *Jara Memorial* (fig. 3) by Lautaro Diaz Silva, (Silva 2003) in the grounds of the Santiago University where Jara taught. It merges music and injustice in a powerful symbolic form. A brass guitar stands upright on a plinth, its middle ripped out and at the end of the neck, the headstock with its tuning pegs is morphed into a hand, contorted with broken fingers reaching upward as if for help. It stands in memory of the popular musician, murdered by government soldiers.

'New Song' in Hobart

There was only a handful of Chileans in Hobart when just over one hundred refugees arrived in 1987. Over the next two years about one hundred more arrived (M Duarte 2017, pers.comm 24 May). The 2016 census showed the population of Chileans in Tasmania at one hundred and ninety four (.id the population experts 2018)

The dispersion of Chileans around the world meant a dispersion of Andean-inspired music, as refugees formed bands and began highlighting their country's plight through live performance in public spaces (Bendrups 2011). The introduction of Latin music to Australia has been explored by Australian scholar and musician Dan Bendrups who studied the *Arauco Libre* band, amongst others. The writer observes (p 198) that the end of the Pinochet dictatorship and the return of democracy in Chile after 1991 did not 'engender a decline in Andean music performance in Australasia. Rather, Andean performers adapted themselves to a "world music" framework which emphasised indigeneity, rather than political protest.' Bendrups concludes that the live Latin music was 'infused with a sense of social purpose.' For the members of *Arauco Libre* and similar bands this was 'reflected in musical

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responses to the political circumstances behind their migration, as well as the challenges posed by adapting to life in their host countries' (p 204). Looking to the future, the author sees the music reflecting 'the interests and desires of a growing intergenerational and multi-layered community striving for a sense of shared identity and belonging' (p 205).

The Hobart band was formed with a desire to get the message out about the injustices of their home continent. Germán Duarte (2017, pers.comm., 8 June) says 'We arrived as Chileans but we soon saw ourselves as South Americans. We saw music as the best way to communicate our message, and it proved to be so.' At first the band was deemed *The Workshop* and was a community project teaching music to those who wanted to join the band. Then the name *Arauco Libre* was chosen, meaning 'freedom for *Araucanos*', the name the Spanish invaders called the Mapuche people (Jarquin 2018). The band championed the cause of these indigenous people, deprived of their rights and their land. Money raised from selling recordings was sent to help build schools for them (M Gonzalez 2017, pers.comm., 10 November).

Following the end of the Pinochet dictatorship and the restoration of democracy in Chile after 1991, the repertoire of the band changed. Embracing new rhythms and sounds, their music gradually evolved from performing protest songs to carnival tunes and dances. These songs embodied the ties with their distant homeland. Gradually, and in a very natural way, the contribution of local musicians expanded *Arauco Libre* musically in the true spirit of world music. (G Duarte 2017, pers.comm., 8 June).

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The band gave the small Hobart Chilean community a sense of identity and kept their heritage alive. 'When we played, we travelled!' says Michael Gonzalez (2017, pers.comm., 10 November): 'My body was in Salamanca Place, Hobart, but my mind and spirit travelled through South America.' The band gave the members a sense of camaraderie - they were not alone but together in a common objective, raising awareness of the plight of their countrymen and women. It was also a time of great enjoyment, a release valve for members who had been working hard all the week, some in mundane jobs. 'We laughed and relaxed, and our joy was infectious with market-goers' says Germán adding, 'we never saw ourselves as buskers but as a community service, creating a multicultural corner in the market space.' (G Duarte 2017, pers.comm., 8 June).

Elias Solis was born in Hobart of Chilean migrant parents, his father a stalwart member of *Arauco Libre*. Elias remembers growing up in Hobart as 'a Tasmanian kid but in a Latin bubble' (2018, pers.comm., 21 November). He recalls going to Salamanca market every Saturday from a very young age and meeting up with other children of band members. He says that the band and their families and friends went to the market to be together as much as to perform. The band was a South American 'hub' within the Hobart community.

There were two clear motivations for the band's existence and long tenure (F Solis 2018, pers.comm., 22 March). The first was the passion of the band members for their homeland, a place they had never wanted to leave. The music kept the fires of home burning and the weekly gathering was a reunion of countrymen who encouraged each other to persist in studies and work in their new land. The second motivation was to 'give something back'. This really

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interests me because what they gave was their music, their colourful culture, a unique gift that enriched our community and was appreciated by so many.

Music and refugees

Research into the important role music plays in the migrant experience confirms what I have gleaned from my interviews with members of *Arauco Libre*. Professor of Sociology at Örebro University, Sweden, Dr Rolf Lidskog (2017) investigates the role of music in cultural identity formation among ethnic groups by analysing thirty-one peer-reviewed papers of qualitative research written on the subject over a period of twenty years. These papers are largely case studies using interviews and observation. He concludes that in 'a world characterised by migration, transnational networks and global flows . . music will continue to be an important way for immigrants and refugees to negotiate and develop their identities in their new setting'.

Katelyn E. Wood in her Masters of Music thesis (2010) uses a case study of refugees to explore the healing power of music. She observes that memories of a familiar melody or lyrics of a song have the capacity to soothe loss, instil hope and strengthen a healthier sense of self. Laura Smith, musician, Arts administrator and researcher at the American University, Washington DC (2011, p 187), finds that 'the arts are not merely passive reflections of a community but rather an active and adaptive force that makes the arts a key element in migration studies.'

The migrant narrative

The migrant narrative, which is the subject of my paintings, may be better

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defined as implied narrative. It is not possible to paint a narrative in a single image but only a particular moment. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, a German writer of the Enlightenment era, described this as a 'fruitful moment'. He said 'Now that alone is fruitful which gives free play to the imagination' (Cooke 2016, p 3). It is in the mind of the viewer where the story takes place. So, for the artist it is more about what is left out, than what is included.

In my suite of paintings, I have chosen to portray the moment of exile, the time when the subjects of the displacement are in-between, suspended between two worlds, in 'limbo' - expelled from their homeland and strangers in a new land and foreign culture. I trust this will be a 'fruitful' moment for the viewer's imagination. In the images, this moment of implied narrative has relegated past oppression, exile, displacement and loss to a background of darkness. The future is implied in the optimistic light that illuminates the instruments. In using the instruments themselves as vehicles for the narrative, I have adopted an allegorical approach, in keeping with the still life genre where objects of everyday life are typically used as symbols to express the transience of life and the vanity of worldly possessions.

Allegory and musical instruments

The moralistic allegories of the *vanitas* still life images include a myriad of instances of musical instruments. The violin and the lute appear as symbols of life, their easily broken strings metaphors of the fragility of earthly existence. Music itself could be interpreted in several ways: a symbol for the arts, pleasure for the senses, temptation and seduction and 'a warning against a lazy and sinful life' (Markovic 2015). Wind instruments like the flute and bagpipes have long been seen in art as phallic objects (Markovic 2015). Ildiko Ember in her

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book *Music and Painting* refers to musical instruments that 'symbolise the sexual sins' (1989 p 28) and the flute as a 'traditional erotic symbol' (1989 p 84). Similarly, Rekkali points out that: 'In the Ancient Greek legend of the musical contest between Apollo and Marsyas, Apollo's lyre stood for harmony and clarity while the Marsyas' double flute was the Bacchic instrument that aroused passion' (Rekkali 2016).

In my allegorical approach, the Andean instruments are invested with new meaning. In this context of migrant narrative, they are symbols of the culture from which they originated. Most prominent are the *siku* (pan flute), and the *quena*, a six-hole flute with a notch in the mouthpiece and an 'incomparable bird-like sound' (Native Flutes 2010). Before the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century there were no stringed instruments in the New World (Garfias 1997). They introduced the *vihuela de mano* which was shaped like a guitar but tuned like a lute (Woods 2015). It was from this instrument that the *charango* evolved. The *charango* looks like a mini-guitar but has ten strings tuned in pairs and a body carved out of a single block of wood with a bowled back. The head-stock needed for the ten strings is often as large as the sound box. Originally associated with peasants in what is now Bolivia, it was first made with an armadillo shell for the back. This is no longer in vogue. Woods (2015, p 167) writes 'the instrument

Fig. 4 Charango by Bolivian luthier Waldo Ponzo

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was adopted and developed by those of mixed descent (mestizo) in the first half of the twentieth century as a symbol of national identity, in order to set themselves apart from the local Spanish (Criollo) community'. Thus, it became an important tool in Andean nationalism and the *indigenismo* movement until now when this classic instrument of musical acculturation is recognised worldwide as a true icon of South American music (Baumann 2004). This point about identity is important to this research, as it is a vital part of the role music played in the band's migrant experience. The culture of the region was so strong that the Spanish culture of the invaders seemed to become absorbed into the indigenous culture (Garfias 1997), so that the traditional instruments survived, and the guitar, introduced by the Spanish, was integrated by the Amerindians into the Andean musical style. I seek to depict these instruments, not as exotic oddities, but in a manner that is respectful of this culture from which they derive.

Portraying the instruments

In the seventeenth century Dutch still life practice, exotic objects were displayed in an ethnocentric way, as objects of curiosity, spoils of colonial endeavour. This was particularly so in the ostentatious *pronkstilleven* tradition which flaunted wealth, showcasing articles procured from the New World such as the nautilus cup, Ming porcelain and vessels of gold and silver. (Bryson 1990, p 126).

Modernist artists too, tended to depict artefacts from other cultures from a European perspective, thus converting them into fetish objects. This was a contentious issue at the 1984 MoMA exhibition entitled *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (Carrier 2013). Two hundred

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artefacts were exhibited without labels or explanation, alongside one hundred and fifty modernist pieces. The exhibition aroused a strong reaction. Foremost among critics was Thomas McEvilley whose paper, 'Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief', observed that the exhibition merely affirmed the superiority of Western culture (2013). He took the curators to task writing:

> The exhibition shows Western egotism still as unbridled as in the centuries of colonialism and souvenirism. The Museum pretends to confront the Third World while really co-opting it and using it to consolidate Western notions of quality and feelings of superiority.

My depiction of the Andean musical instruments is informed by an appreciation of their cultural significance as communicated in interviews with band members. My intention is to portray them with dignity and without condescension, as quasi-portraits of the musicians who play them. The eucalypt trees in the images are a metaphor of their new land, Australia. These metaphors, along with the void and the raking light, combine in a redemptive visual allegory of hope and human endeavour. Hanging the instruments from trees references the trope of exile originating in the exilic poetry of Psalm 137 where we read, 'we hung our harps on the willows.'

Trope of exile

In Chapter three, *The Studio Journey*, I explain how the discovery of the motif of instruments hanging in Psalm 137, influenced this project. The hanging harps were incidental in the researched images, the subject matter being people on a riverbank. While this trope of exile is rare in the visual arts I found that it has

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been used extensively in music and literature. Psalm 137, a favourite of oppressed peoples, has inspired many composers and writers.

The hit song, *Rivers of Babylon*, first recorded in 1970 by the Jamaican group, *The Melodians*, has 'established a global presence through myriad cover versions and diegetic use in world cinema' (Stowe 2016). Lyrics from *On the Willows,* in the rock musical Godspell, include *there we hung up our lyres.* Czechoslovakian composer Antonín Dvořák in his song *By the shore of the river Babylon,* has a line that translates into English: *We hung up our guitars.* Giuseppe Verdi's first opera, *Nabucco* (1841), was about the Babylonian Exile, and one chorus, *Va pensiero* (The Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves), includes the words:

> Golden harp of our prophets,
> why do you hang silently on the willow?
> Rekindle the memories of our hearts,
> and speak of the times gone by!

These are just a few instances of the rich use of the trope in musical lyrics. In literature many Jewish writers, over many eons, have also referenced the trope (Ben-Horin 2015). Michal Ben-Horin uses the word violin for its predecessor, the lyre or harp, as she traces 'the trope of the violin' (p 144) through the history of her people from the time of King David to the present.

She writes (p 123) 'The symbolic violin previously hung above David's bed is now hung upon the willows, silent, deprived of its sacred melodies . . . Torn out of its homeland the musical instrument goes silent, though its image reverberates with the Jewish longing for Zion.' What Ben-Horin is expressing

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powerfully in words I aim to express in paint by making the trope of the silent instrument hanging, central in my work. She references a story, *Thoughts and Violin* by Y L Peretz, in which the image of the violin becomes 'an absolute expression of the Jewish soul' (p 124). This personification of the violin parallels my aim in painting South American instruments as quasi-portraits of their owners. This discussion is a reminder of where the project is positioned: at the intersection of music and the visual arts.

Music and painting

In his book *The Music of Painting* Peter Vergo (2010) discusses the parallels of rhythm, repetition, motif, tone, texture, colour, contrast and motion, between the sister arts of music and painting, which have long been a fascination for many artists. The strategy of exploring these parallels in paint was prominent in the early part of my project, especially when I was attempting abstract interpretations of the music. Since I changed the focus to still life this has not been so prominent. However, in painting musical instruments, the intersection of musical and visual arts is inevitably there.

Consideration of this intersection has contributed to the strategy of leaving space in the images to 'hear' the music, or at least contemplate the sound of the instrument which, itself, needs space for its sound to travel and echo. British artist Christopher Le Brun, who researched the 'spatiality' of music in his abstract paintings has said: 'When you listen to music, you feel the rhythm, you feel the presence of the music, but you also very powerfully feel the spatiality' (Marks 2017). While music is a temporal art, it is perceived in space (de Bértola 1972) and when we hear music we sense that it surrounds us. Paintings are silent of course, but Robert Chirico (Mabilat 2017, p 163) asks a provocative

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question: 'What do we listen for in the visual arts?' Claire Mabilat argues (p 163) that music incorporated visually into an image creates an extra dimension, 'appealing to the viewer's sense of sound as well as sight.' Tom Phillips argues similarly that a musical instrument animates the stillness and 'can set the air of the picture alive with sound' (p 205). If this is so, then my images of Andean instruments may evoke their own music, heightened by the empty negative space surrounding the instruments.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the vital role that music played in South American culture in the struggles for liberation that culminated in the election of the Allende government. It was also entwined in the politics that saw Chilean exiles sent to Hobart. Andean-inspired music became an integral part of the identity of the members of this case study who, in interviews, gave testimony to the way music bound them together, kept alive memories of their homeland, sustained them in difficulties and was a currency that enabled them to negotiate their way in a strange land.

In the latter part of the chapter I began to explore the expression of these ideas visually. After considering the allegorical use of musical instruments in European musical iconography I affirmed the use of allegory as a key strategy in my work, outlining the symbolic meanings associated with the project's South American instruments. I then discussed the way the instruments can be presented appropriately and the trope of exile before addressing the significance of the intersection of sister arts of music and painting which influences the project.

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In the next chapter I will review some key artists who have influenced my quest to take the ideas laid out in this chapter and express them in paint. This includes still life artists from the traditions of the Spanish *bodegóns* and the Dutch *vanitas* to painters of musical instruments. I also examine the work of three contemporary artists that reinvents and reinvigorates the still life genre.

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Chapter 2 ARTISTS OF INFLUENCE

In this chapter I review some of the artists that have informed the project. They all belong to the four-hundred-year-old tradition of the still life genre and are reviewed in chronological order. Old Spanish masters, Juan Sanchez Cotan and Francisco de Zurbaran influence the project with their use of chiaroscuro and space. Evaristo Bachenis, the Italian painter, specialised in portraying musical instruments. I take two examples from the golden era of Dutch still life. First, I analyse Harmen Steenwyk's *Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life*, 1640 for its conceptual and allegorical content, and then study Adriaen Coorte (1665-1705) for more formal considerations. Moving to the twentieth century I look at how Raoul Dufy painted musical instruments in a musical way. The chapter concludes with three, twenty-first century artists including photographer Joachim Froese who uses the device of suspending objects to invest emotion and meaning into his compositions, and two realist painters – Cindy Wright and Teresa Fischer – who reinterpret still life with contemporary meaning but in contrasting ways. Cindy Wright, whose work is thoroughly anchored in the *vanitas* tradition of the seventeenth century, has sobering political undertones, while Teresa Fischer's images are whimsical and melancholic.

Juan Sanchez Cotan

Among the first still life painters in Europe was Juán Sanchez Cotán (1560-1627). *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber*, (fig. 5) is one of his best-known images and has had a deep influence on my suite of paintings. The strong light illuminates the fruit and vegetables, two of which are dangling in darkness. The light that reveals the wrinkles of the cabbage, does not penetrate the darkness. John Marciari, of the San Diego Museum of Art says 'because of the

Fig. 5, Juan Sanchez Cotan, *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber*, 1602, oil on canvas, 68.9 cm x 84.5 cm.

sparseness, the almost abstracted quality of it, it is "approachable" to modern eyes in a way that historic paintings of courtiers, angels and battles are not.' (Jarmusch, 2011)

The stringing up of fruit and vegetables, in this and similar images of his, brings drama to the composition and focus on the form of the objects that hover freely with an intensity greater than those that rest on other things. The geometric curve made by the way the objects are placed is highly considered and adds to the theatrical feeling, as the pantry shelf becomes a stage and the fruits, performers.

Cotan's suspension of objects informs my work directly, where illuminated instruments hang in front of a curtain of darkness. The light on Cotan's vegetables brings them forward as objects of contemplation. This idea is illustrated further in the work of Cotan's Spanish compatriot, Francisco du Zurbaran.

Francisco du Zurbaran

In *Still Life with Pottery Jars*, 1660, (fig. 5) Francisco du Zurbaran (1598-1664) painted objects bathed in light against an almost black void that recedes into infinity. This focuses attention on the form and significance of the objects and provides space for meditation. The extraordinary realism of another of his works – *A Cup of Water and a Rose*, (fig. 6) – is amplified by the simplicity of the image and the rich, warm, contrasting darkness. There are no straight lines, all are curved, lending a gentleness to a sensitive, softly-lit composition. The saucer is not grounded but levitates in space. Both images show sharp edges, that accentuate the forms, and soft blurred edges that anchor the objects in the

Fig. 6, Francisco du Zurbaran, *Still Life with Pottery Jars*, 1660, Oil on canvas, 46 x 84 cm

Fig. 7, Francisco du Zurbaran, *A Cup of Water and a Rose*, c 1630, oil on canvas, 21.2 x 30.1 cm

image. At the same time, the objects emerge from the darkness into the viewer's space insisting on his or her attention. In my work I adopted this manner of treating the edges and sought to have the objects not only grounded but emerging, as if from the past.

My concern here is with the formal ways of presenting objects in still life. I now turn to an artist who specialised in painting musical instruments, the subject matter of my work.

Evaristo Baschenis

In 2000 the Metropolitan Museum of Art convened an exhibition of the still life paintings of musical instruments by Evaristo Baschenis (1617-1677) aptly titled *Music of Silence.* The exhibition overview (2000) claimed that he singlehandedly invented a new genre, that of still life specialising in musical instruments.

Fig. 8, Evaristo Baschenis, *Still Life with Musical Instruments,* 1650, oil on canvas,115 x 160 cm

The silence of his images is emphasised by the instruments lying prostrate, some upside down. The absence of the players endows the instruments with anthropomorphic characteristics – something that I also seek to do in my works in which the instruments are treated as quasi-portraits. Empty negative

space (fig. 7) seems waiting to be filled with music, latent in the beautiful curved forms of the instruments. This use of space has informed my work. Formally it brings focus to the objects and conceptually it opens up the image to a variety of interpretations.

The theatrical composition of another of Baschenis' still life paintings of musical instruments (fig. 9) in which a heavy patterned curtain is pulled back revealing several instruments, as if on stage, also anticipates their performance -- actors about to arise from slumber to present rich drama. It is a moment in

Fig. 9, Evaristo Baschenis, *Still Life with Musical Instruments,* 1660-1680 circa, 87 x 115 cm

time that appeals to the imagination of the viewer to create the narrative. This theatrical reference is also in my work, as the instruments are spot lit and the centre of attention.

Scholars differ in their interpretations of Baschenis' images. While lauding his painterly skill, focused on the aesthetic and the decorative, Kren and Marx (1996) say his work lacks 'allegorical or moral significance.' Ildiko Ember

(1989, p 45) differs saying that while his work is free of the 'soul-searching dilemma' of some other seventeenth-century painters, the instruments themselves become symbols of the *vanitas* idea. Charlotte Poulton says 'The paintings demonstrate how resonances of a dominant mode of death, silence, absence, and the spiritual can be orchestrated by the physical properties of musical instruments' (2008, p 237). This capacity of musical instruments for allegory is critical to my enquiry. One of the great examples of allegory in still life is a painting by Dutch artist, Harmen Steenwyck (1612-1656).

Harmen Steenwyck

Steenwyck was one of the foremost still life painters in the *vanitas* tradition. An analysis of his best-known image, *Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life* (fig. 10) reveals several strategies that I am employing.

Steenwyck's image is divided diagonally into two halves. The lower half is filled with objects, heavy with meaning, and is an allegory of earthly life. The ethereal top half is devoid of all but a ray of light. This top half of the image, a metaphor of the spiritual, contrasts formally and conceptually with the lower. The geometric composition and the stunning rendering of the objects, along with the plethora of symbolism, give rise to the term used by Kristine Koozin (1990, p 1) to describe this image: metaphoric realism. The use of allegory, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is central in my project where the instruments are symbolic of their owners and their culture.

A ray of light shines on an angle that enhances the composition, but it is far more. Like a spotlight from heaven, it illuminates the skull and makes it the

Fig. 10, Harmen Steenwyck, *Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life*, 1640, oil on oak panel, 39.2 x 50.7 cm

primary object in the image, a symbol of mortality lit by eternal light. The light which is the only entity in the top half is a metaphor for immortality. In my suite of images there are no rays of light but the strategy of light is a key one, as the forms are illuminated in contrast to the darkness, a metaphor of hope in a new land.

The duality in Steenwyck's work is heightened by the way the composition is split into two even halves. The earthly is contrasted with the heavenly, light with dark, mortality with immortality, clutter with space, passing pleasures with enduring peace. Duality is a methodology employed in my research. I find contrasts in the *Arauco Libre* case study between oppression and freedom, past and future, disappointment and hope, nostalgia for homeland lost and optimism in a new abode, between two different cultures and two different

continents. This duality is expressed visually by the contrast between dark and light, between Australian vegetation and South American instruments.

While Steenwyck had many symbolic objects in his compositions, his fellow Dutchman, Adriaen Coorte (1665-1705) had a more simplified approach.

Adriaen Coorte

Adriaen Coorte (1665-1705) developed a very deliberate compositional strategy in his many paintings of different fruits. He often narrowed his investigation to one variety at a time, seeking to reveal, in paint, the essence of that particular fruit. This intense focus is passed on to the viewer who is invited to contemplate the highlighted object. Applying this strategy, I have painted one instrument of the ensemble at a time. Each instrument is distinct, with its own history, its own voice and its own form, and like Coorte's images, is painted life size.

Fig. 11, Adriaen Coorte, *Still Life with Two Walnuts*, 1702, oil on paper on cardboard, 10.9 x 15.6 cm.

The intensity of focus on the fruit in *Still Life with Two Walnuts* (fig. 11) is accentuated by the dark negative space and as I look, I am acutely aware of the wonder of a walnut shell. My mind is transported to collecting walnuts at my uncle's farm as a child and smashing them open, with difficulty, to get the

tasty flesh. The light in the picture is subtle yet probing and the warmth of the background gives a pleasing unity. The line of the understated shelf contrasts with the curves of the walnut's armour and aids the perception of a third dimension. While the image is skilfully painted, it is not the show of virtuosity that captivates the viewer, but it is the subject matter itself.

Coorte's work is in sharp contrast to many of his Dutch contemporaries whose still lives were often ostentatious, crowded with objects, and loaded with symbolic meaning. He uses a repeated compositional formula in the various images. There is strength in this repetition when the images are viewed together, bringing a unifying common thread. This is another element that I am including in my work, a repeated format.

The colour of the background differs in each of the four portrait-shaped images included. In *Four Apricots on a Stone Plinth*, (fig. 12) the dimly lit apricots are surrounded by a warm dark tone that picks up some of the same colour as the fruit, creating an emotion of home. In *Still Life of Asparagus*, (fig. 13) there is a green bias that harmonises with the white asparagus, tinged with green and has a feeling of energy. There is a contrast in *Two Peaches,* (fig. 14) where the pale yellow of the peaches glows against the dark, which has a purple bias and a feeling of anticipation. In the image *Still Life with Three Medlars and a Butterfly*, circa 1696-1705 (fig. 15) there is an emotion of stillness as a butterfly hovers against a warm, almost black space, its colour echoing the light on the tabletop. A background, however plain, is an essential component of a still life composition, creating room to reflect on the focussed object and contributing to the emotion of the image. Likewise, in my series of paintings, I

have used a variety of blacks to create differences between the images and subtly influence the emotion of the image.

Fig. 12, Adriaen Coorte, *Four Apricots on a Stone Plinth*, 1698, oil paint on paper mounted on panel, 28.8 cm x 21.1 cm

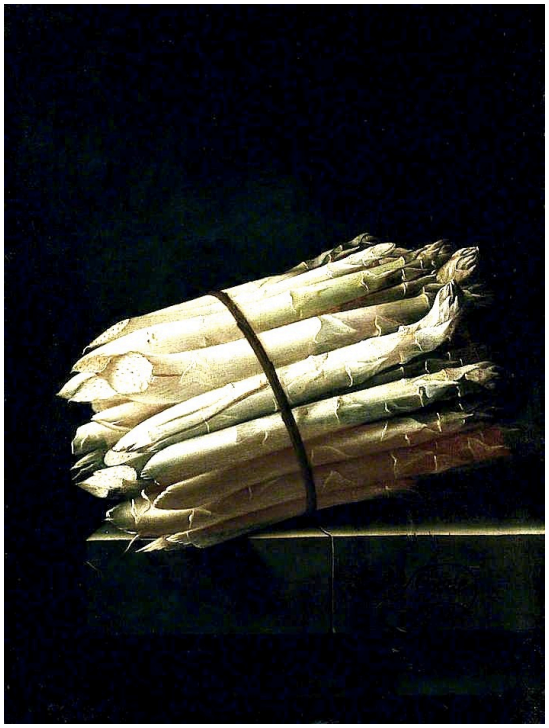

Fig. 13, Adriaen Coorte, *Still Life of Asparagus,* 1699, oil paint on paper mounted on panel, 29 x 22 cm

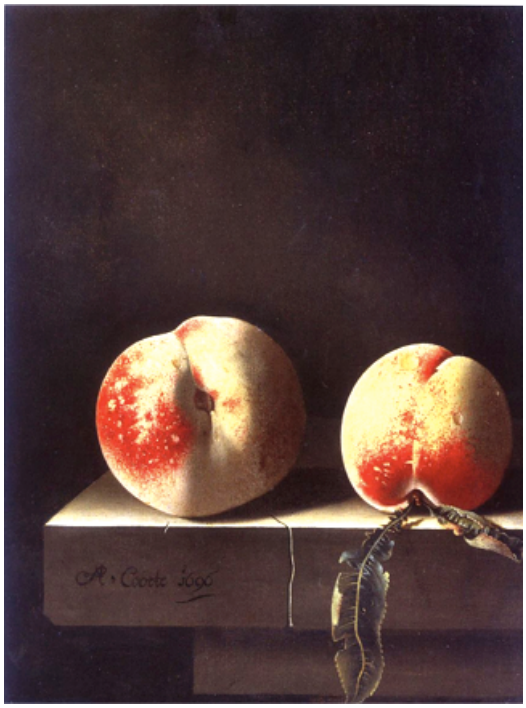

Fig. 14, Adriaen Coorte, *Two Peaches,* 1698, oil paint on paper mounted on panel, 27.9 x 22.8 cm

Fig. 15, Adriaen Coorte, *Still Life with Three Medlars and a Butterfly*, circa 1696-1705, oil paint on paper mounted on panel, 27 x 20 cm

While the heyday of the still life genre was in the seventeenth century, there has been a revival of interest in this genre in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as artists seek to re-interpret this tradition in a contemporary context. Raoul Dufy used still life to express his musical ideas.

Raoul Dufy

The different voices and visual characteristics of musical instruments were of great interest to French artist Raoul Dufy (1877-1953). A musician himself, he 'sought to transpose these through a sort of filter, of colours and forms' (Bateman 2000). In the following images, a single instrument becomes a meta-

Fig. 16, Raoul Dufy, *Still life with violin,* lithograph, date not available, 42.2 x 50.7 cm

phor for music itself. The way that Dufy employs the space around the object deepens this reading of metaphor. In my work the instruments also function as metaphors and it is the treatment of space and other elements in the image that determines this.

In the lithograph *Still life with violin* (fig. 16), Dufy achieves this by making the colours bleed and fill the space. Musical calligraphic markings swirl in joyous

Fig. 17, Raoul Dufy, *The Red Violin,* 1949, oil on canvas, 22.5 x 27.5 cm

celebration. By contrast in *The Red Violin* (fig. 17), painted late in his career, we see a more simplified composition. All unnecessary information has been eliminated. The white manuscript is stripped of musical notation and the violin is a sparse but eloquent outline. Red flowing from the violin fills the image as music fills a room.

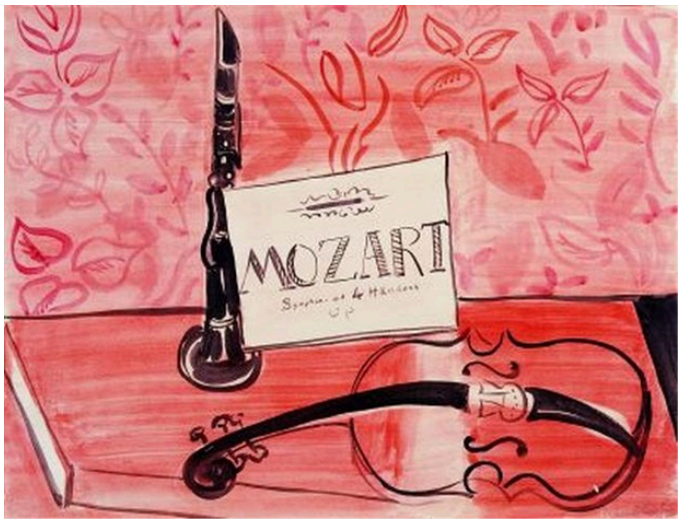

Fig. 18, Raoul Dufy, *Violon,Flute et partitions de Mozart,* circa 1949, watercolour and ink, 48 x 65 cm.

In *Violon, flute et partitions de Mozart* (fig. 18) there is a spacious background but instead of being plain, a musical pattern of brushstrokes, like dancing notes, fills the space in one unified colour (this time pink) like the key of a piece of music. The violin and clarinet are joined by the word Mozart on the score, and the black of the clarinet and the fingerboard of the violin anchor a melodious composition.

Other more recent artists including Joachim Froese, while not depicting musical instruments, have re-interpreted the still life genre in ways which relate to my project.

Joachim Froese

Master photographer Joachim Froese (1963-) completed a residency in Barcelona where he studied Spanish Still Life, particularly Juan Sanchez Cotan (Froese 2002) discussed earlier. I will comment on two of his works that are quite different yet both use Cotan's device of suspending objects to great effect.

Working in sombre black and white, and eschewing digital techniques, Froese choreographed three images, mesmerising and surreal. *Rhopography #23*, 2002, (fig. 19), a triptych of silver gelatin prints, shows a bunch of fish-heads atop intact, fleshless backbones, exiled from their watery world, suspended in a bare, ghostly aquarium, where they appear to search for food. The impeccable lighting and chiaroscuro, the compositional balance, and the quality of the prints belie the banality of the subject and present a ballet, at once exquisite and macabre.

The compositional ploys of suspension and impenetrable darkness are of great interest to my project, as is the sparse, alien environment. I find these images

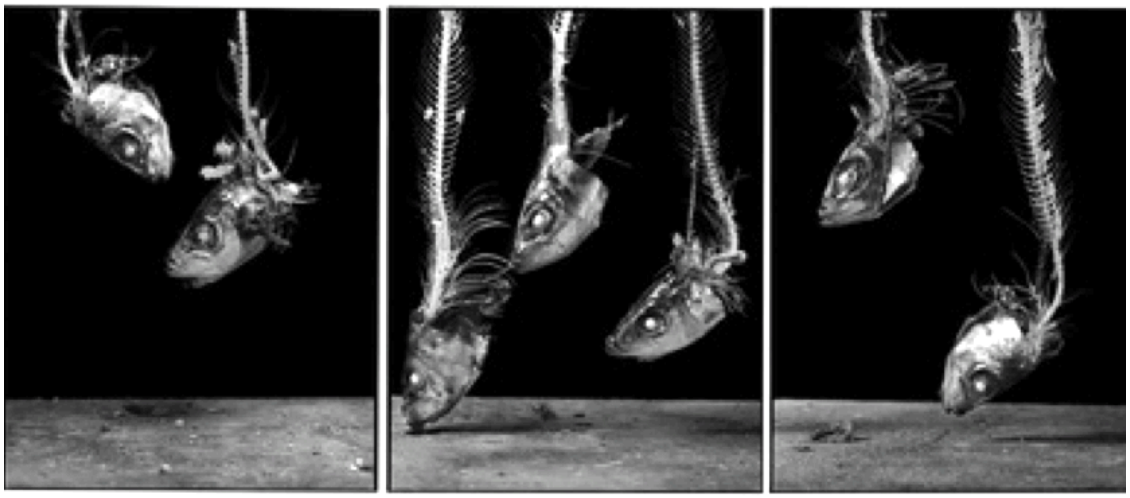

Fig. 19, Joachim Froese, *Rhopography #23*, 2002, 3 silver gelatin prints, 36 x 86 cm

hold my attention and my eyes move back and forth from one to the other. Having the three images side by side adds to their intensity.

The second pair of images followed the death of his mother, when a grieving Froese made several works in her memory. In *Archive #11* (fig. 20) two white coffee pots with blue rose pattern are suspended in pouring positions above a matching cup and saucer. There is no hand of a hostess. The pots are frozen in action. A similar image *Archive #13* (fig. 21) has a milk jug and a traditional china teapot poised above a curious stack of four cups.

His methodology of symbolism opens the image to many interpretations. The clay vessels, a time-worn metaphor for the fragility of human life, hang by thin silver wire reminding me of the words from Ecclesiastes 12:6, 7.

> Remember him—before the silver cord is severed,
>
> and the golden bowl is broken;

before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,
and the wheel broken at the well,
and the dust returns to the ground it came from,
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

The ritual of afternoon tea is a very familiar one but this scene lacks the warmth of hospitality. Froese freezes the empty jugs in time, trapped in pouring posture, and poignantly, his mother is absent. The simple elegance of the tea set, beautifully balanced, contrasts with the empty, eerie, lifeless, space. There is no tablecloth, no food, no domestic paraphernalia; the cupboard is bare. It alludes to times past. Someone, now departed, chose the tea service with its rose pattern, which hauntingly drags our eye around the picture.

Fig. 20, Joachim Froese, *Archive #11*, 2008,
3 archival pigment inkjet prints, 93 x 46 cm

Fig. 21, Joachim Froese, *Archive #13*, 2008,
3 archival pigment inkjet prints, 93 x 46 cm

The formal qualities of the image are highly contrived. The distinctive shape of each object is intensified as it hangs freely in space. It is this focus on the essence of the object that Cotan exploited when he dangled a cabbage and other things before the viewer. And it is this device that is central to my strategy. The crisp chiaroscuro and the absence of all else also bring lingering focus to the images. The next artist in this chapter also uses these strategies in intense, direct references to the *vanitas* tradition.

Cindy Wright

Three works of current Belgian artist, Cindy Wright (1972-), are great examples of how the *vanitas* genre can be re-invested with meaning, addressing contemporary issues. Wright's approach is confronting while mine is not, yet I find her capacity to communicate multi-layered meanings through the paintings of objects to be very eloquent.

The first image, *Nature Mort 2* (fig. 22) challenges issues of consumption and explores current sensitivities about consuming meat and animal rights. Whereas fish, oysters and lobsters glittered on platters in Dutch 'breakfast paintings', in a display of luxury, Wright shocks with a bloodied, gutted fish, jammed in a goldfish bowl – victim rather than victual. Even the bowl itself feels crammed into the canvas, the whole image much larger than life size. There are no other elements save the doily on which the bowl sits, putting intense focus on the fish. The power of object and space to convey meaning is clearly demonstrated.

Fig. 22, Cindy Wright, *Nature Mort 2,* 2010, oil on linen, 140 cm x 140 cm

Another of her works, *Festoon of Fruits and Fly* (fig. 24) which pastiches Jan Davidszoon de Heem's, *Festoon of Fruit and Flowers,* (fig. 23) appears at first colourful and attractive but on further observation is unnerving and subversive. The fruit is being defiled by bugs, snails and

Fig. 23, Jan Davidszoon de Heem, *Festoon of Fruit and Flowers*, between 1660 and 1670, oil on canvas, 74 x 60 cm

Fig. 24, Cindy Wright, *Festoons of Fruits and Fly,* oil on linen, 190 x 126 cm

blow flies. Empty banana skins droop and the blue ribbon in de Heem's festoon is replaced by the corpse of a blue bird, its claws (one tagged) contorted in the air. The word 'festoon' is given current meaning with a festoon light bulb. It hangs on an electric cable encased with the objects of environmental concern. Again, my strategy of dark backgrounds is affirmed, by Wright's brightly lit 'festoon' being contrasted with darkness that resonates with her theme.

The most unsettling of the three images has a curious title, *Collector's item* (fig. 25). This image also uses the device of hanging objects, in this case an assorted bunch of human skulls. I have been analysing how suspending objects in an

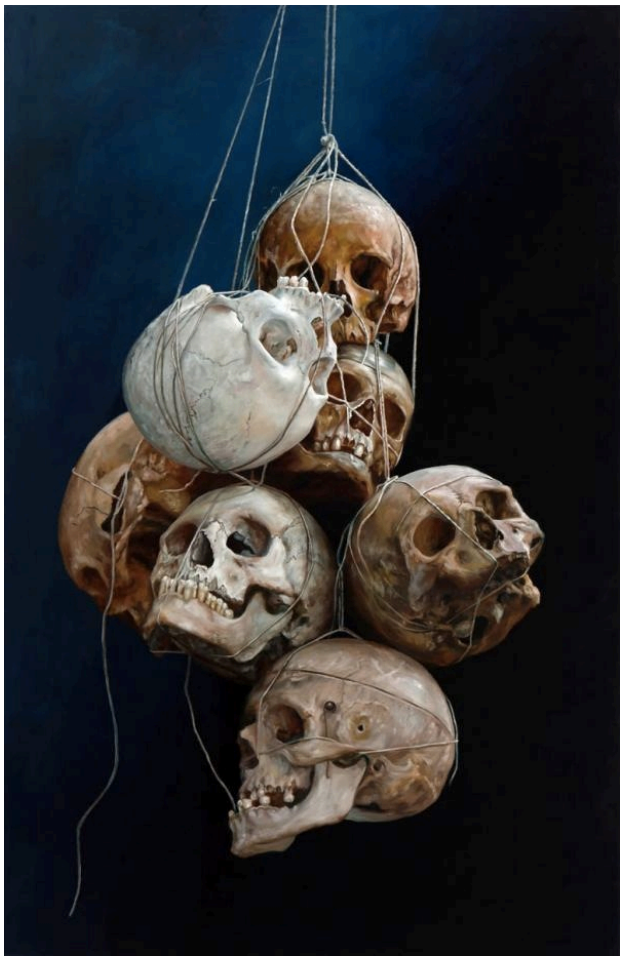

Fig. 25. Cindy Wright, *Collector's Item,* 2010, oil on linen,170 x 110 cm

image affects its reading. In this case it influences the reading profoundly. Despite the classic *vanitas* motif, this image is not about death but about desecration. It references the ethnocentric, colonial practice of collecting the bones of 'natives' and displaying them in museums. The skulls hang, lost in darkness, with no place to rest. The work is something of a protest. While my work is not protesting the eurocentric treatment of foreign artifacts in traditional still life (Bryson 1990, p 127) I present Andean instruments, not as exotic curiosities but with dignity in their own right.

In contrast to Cindy Wright's brilliant, but disturbing, grotesque images, the work of the final artist uses the still life genre to convey a gentler message.

Teresa Fischer

Teresa N Fischer (1971-) reimagines still life to paint nostalgic images of toys. She employs the traditional devices of still life, lighting, dark background and shadow to convey contemporary meaning. In *When Pigs Fly* (fig. 26) she celebrates the imagination of childhood as the wooden pig on wheels hovers in the

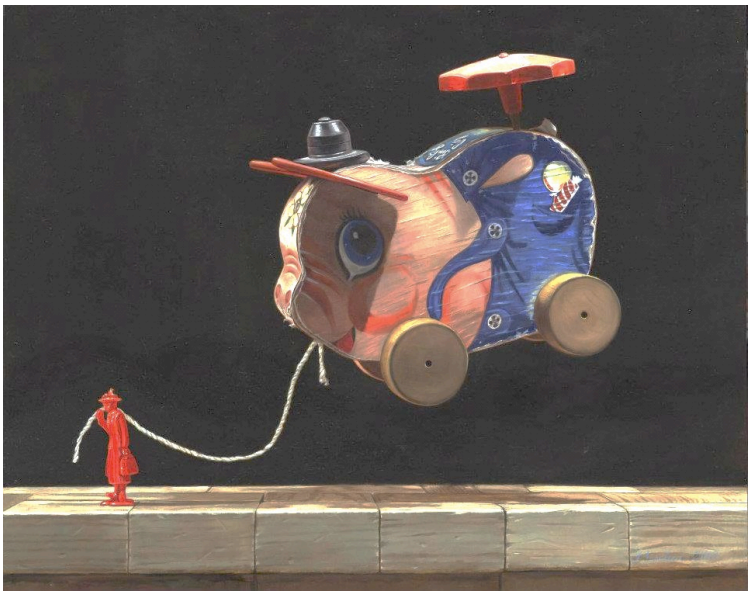

Fig. 26, Teresa N Fischer, *When Pigs Fly*, date unavailable, oil on linen, 40.6 cm x 50.8

air under a small parachute-like form. An unlikely tiny red soldier appears to hold the end of a string leash. The image is playful, whimsical and melancholy all at once. It mourns a childhood lost, and the passing of an age of simplicity before electronic devices.

Fig. 27, Teresa N Fischer, *Ol' No. 5,* 2011, oil on panel,40.6 x 30.5 cm

In *Ol' No. 5* (fig. 27) the well-worn toy racing car is 'on blocks'. Replicas of the number five lean or lie in disuse. The subject matter would appear to predate the childhood of the artist. Maybe the objects belonged to her father - nuts, letters, and the vintage car, now on a pedestal. Evoking memories of the past, a touch of sadness is conveyed by Fischer's very effective use of shadow. In my suite of images, those with shadows have an extra emotional intensity, evoking feelings of nostalgia.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed several artists whose work, situated in the genre of still life, has directly informed mine. All images clearly demonstrate

the capacity of still life to convey meaning and emotion by the judicious use of space and the treatment of the objects. Several employ the device of hanging the object/s and I have shown how this intensifies emotional impact. Light is used strategically in all the paintings while the backgrounds provide room for meditation and reflection. The more recent works show the versatility and adaptability of still life to engage with contemporary issues.

In the next chapter I elaborate on my studio journey discussing how I have applied strategies from the traditional still life genre and re-purposed them to serve as an allegory for the migrant experience of the band members of *Arauco Libre*.

Chapter 3 THE STUDIO JOURNEY

The title *Song in a Strange Land*, words from Psalm 137, was chosen at the commencement of my project because it brings together, poetically, the ideas of music and exile. However, it was not until I had researched the history of the members of the band *Arauco Libre* and the circumstances of their forced migration that I returned to the psalm. Refugees throughout history have identified with the emotion of the words of Psalm 137 (Stowe 2016) and the loss of home and culture so eloquently described:

> By the rivers of Babylon,
> There we sat down, yea, we wept
> When we remembered Zion.
> We hung our harps
> Upon the willows in the midst of it.
> For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song,
> And those who plundered us requested mirth,
> Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
> How shall we sing the Lord's song
> In a strange land? (Psalm 137:1-4)

In addressing the sentiments expressed by this Psalm I discovered that it has inspired a number of artists who have explored the theme of exile. Most notable amongst these is Eugéne Delacroix who painted a refugee family on the riverbank (Ribner 2014) as part of a cupola in the *Palais Bourbon*, Paris (fig. 28).

The mother looks down in a depressed fashion while the father looks up thinking of home. A harp hangs listlessly on a tree depicting the phrase, *we hung our harps upon the willows*. It is one of four biblical paintings in the cupola (Zieve, 2009) each one addressing exile, oppression or persecution.

Fig, 28. Eugéne Delacroix, *The Babylonian Captivity*, 1843-1845, oil on ceiling, 221 x 292 cm

In the image by German artist Gebhard Fugel, (fig. 29) *By the rivers of Babylon* a group of Jewish people, with exaggerated body language of sadness and fatigue, crowd at the water's edge looking as if they have just arrived from the long, forced march. Among the few possessions that they took with them were their musical instruments. Some harps can be seen hanging from a tree.

Fig. 29, Gebhard Fugel, *By the rivers of Babylon*, 1920

Discovery of this trope of exile, the hanging instrument, felt like a breakthrough moment.

I had painted two musicians in the setting of Salamanca Market, *Latin Corner* (fig. 30), the place of their regular performance. Feeling that this image was too literal, and stimulated by the depictions of the Babylonian captivity, I embarked on a painting of five men sitting awkwardly in a bush landscape on the Queens Domain, a hill overlooking the Hobart CBD, using the motif of instruments hanging from trees, in this case, eucalyptus trees (fig 32). The Australian vegetation adds to the migrant narrative of a strange new land, displacement and the challenge of integration.

Fig. 30, Ron Wilson 2017, *Latin Corner,* oil on board, 90 x 60 cm

The image references the colonial

paintings of Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917) of the Heidelberg School, who celebrated the courage and indomitable character of pioneer settlers of over a century ago. He painted the bush around Melbourne and the settlers who sought to carve out a life in a rugged new land. Iconic paintings like *Down on his Luck* (1889), *Bush Idyll* (1893) and *The Pioneer* (1904) had figures pitted against the untamed bush. In *Bush Idyll* (fig. 31) a musical flavour is introduced as a young man plays a small flute for a girl, a moment of serenity in a harsh land.

Fig. 31, Frederick McCubbin, *Bush Idyll,* 1893, oil on canvas, 119.5 x 221.5 cm

In my painting, *Strange Land*, (fig. 32) one man is reaching for a suspended *charango* while a Spanish guitar hangs in the eye of the image. I feel that this painting expresses the isolation initially felt by the Chilean migrants. In an interview with Germán Duarte (2017 pers.comm., 8 June) he referred to the literal meaning of nostalgia, derived from the Greek words *nostas*, meaning homecoming, and *algia*, meaning pain (Online Etymology Dictionary). Germán recalls feeling uprooted, leaving broken roots behind:

> I missed family, friends, the streets, the smells . . . We did not choose Hobart as our destination but we were sent. However, it proved to be a good place for our families; its size meant we could integrate into the local community better than the larger cities.

Fig. 32, Ron Wilson, *Strange Land*, 2017, oil on hardboard, 90 x 120 cm

Even though I felt something of this narrative was embedded in the painting I was aiming for something less literal. Nevertheless, the image was important in my research journey because it led to an idea that propelled the project forward. This idea was to focus on the instruments themselves, using these as a metaphor for the migrant experience.

In considering the primary research question, 'How to express in visual form, the music of *Arauco Libre* and its role in their migration experience', my attention turned to still life, an area of previous research. Still life has a strong tradition of musical instruments: 'Music is often chosen by poets and artists as a symbol for the fragility of the moment and the transitoriness of life' (Seebass 2014).

My next painting, *The Shaman's Drum and the Bombo* (fig. 33), was a still life of two drums, well-lit against a black background that recedes into eternity. This tenebrismic strategy is one that I had employed in a previous still life painting, *Owen* (fig. 34), about my late father-in-law for my Honours project.

Fig. 33, Ron Wilson, *The Shaman's Drum and the Bombo*, 2017, oil on hardboard, 60 x 60 cm,

Fig. 34, Ron Wilson, *Owen,* 2015, oil on board, 40 x 75 cm

The chromatic black in the drum painting, made of layers of cadmium red and Payne's grey, brings focus onto the dialogue between the ritual drum (*kultrung*) of the *Machi* (shaman) and the *bombo* drum. Band leader, Germán Duarte (2017, pers.comm., 8 June) explained the influence of the shaman in Mapuche culture:

> The *Machi*, a woman, played a small drum the surface of which is divided into quarters. The top two quarters represents the north earth and the bottom two the south earth. Evil was said to come from the north and the *Machi*, considered a seer into the future, would beat the top half of the drum if she was conveying a message of bad tidings. It is ironic that the coming of the Spanish, which brought such hardship to the indigenous peoples, was from the north.

This painting brings together the three streams that nourish *Nueva Cancion* music (Pirard 1982, p 599): the traditional folk music of various indigenous populations, the European with the arrival of the Spanish, and African rhythms from the era of the slave trade. The Spanish influence on culture and music is referenced by the red and yellow (Spanish flag) of the textile cloth, on which the drums sit. The *kultrung* and the *bombo* reference the Amerindian and African influences respectively.

The blackness in this image functions in several ways. It brings focus to the illuminated objects, thrusting them forward to claim the attention of the viewer so that they become objects of contemplation. At the same time, the stillness of this negative space creates room, a silence, for such reflection.

Combining two images

From the first image, *Strange Land,* I took the concept of South American instruments hanging in the Australian bush. Then from the second image I took the method of tenebrism and devised a plan to paint a series of 'portraits' of Andean instruments each suspended from a branch of an Australian tree in full light against a black void, in portrait format. The paintings of two *quena* flutes (fig. 35) and a pair of maracas (fig. 36) are examples. The resulting series of still life paintings explores the qualities of the Latin instruments, each one unique in form, sound and origin, and functioning as quasi-portraits of the musicians who played them.

It is interesting to compare these images with paintings I made of people early on in the project. In *Second Language* (fig. 37) the Duarte brothers are in concert and in *Camilo* (fig 38) the next generation bears witness to successful integration into a new society. My assessment of these images is that, although the colours brought a sense of South America, they lack depth of meaning when compared to the quasi-portraits of suspended instruments. The latter are more open to interpretation, more evocative and poetic.

One of the reasons for this is that there are no recognisable backgrounds; the images are not linked to any one particular locality or locked into one specific narrative. This opens them to other readings. So while generated by the experience of the members of *Arauco Libre,* they are metaphors for cultural displacement more generally and may resonate with people who have been 'left hanging' by experiences of life.

Fig. 35, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land # 4,* 2018, oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm

Fig. 36, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land # 1,* 2018, oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm

Fig. 37, Ron Wilson, *Second Language,* oil on hardboard, 2017, 60 x 60 cm

Fig. 38, Ron Wilson, *Camillo,* oil on hardboard, 2017, 60 x 60 cm

In the studio

Using my own photographs of the instruments, and cropped images of gum tree leaves, I trialled various compositions in Photoshop. Constructing images in Photoshop helped determine the overall size of the paintings. By leaving a proportionate amount of negative space, I was able to determine the dimensions of the supports to paint the images at about life size. The images were transferred to the hardboard support using a grid. While the ideas were strong and the compositions balanced, the first paintings tended to rely too much on the Photoshop images. The method of painting the figure first and then adding the dark ground tended to make the figures look like cut-outs with hard edges. The figures did not belong to the background and sat apart. While there was a duality between dark and light, figure and ground, they seemed not to belong to each other in the way they should.

Fig. 39, Louise Hearman, *Untitled #892 2002,* Oil on Masonite, 61 x 61 cm

After studying the work of Louise Hearman, who uses illuminated figures against dark grounds, I reworked the images, softening and blurring some edges of the figure enriching the relationship between the dark background and the figure. In Hearman's painting *Untitled #892* (fig. 39) the highlighted cheekbone of the young woman is hard-edged against the inky background as are the highlights on the shawl. Or, is it a shawl? The ambiguity is heightened by it

merging into the darkness. At the same time the girl's body disappears into the darkness and the edge of the dark side of her head is soft and merges with the dark ground. Inspired by Hearman's approach, in a subsequent painting of two maracas, I did the dark ground first and then erased the areas for the instruments and the leaves. This created the feeling that the maracas were emerging from the darkness into the light. The whole painting seemed more integrated.

Again, looking at Hearman's work I concluded that a void need not be static or monotone. In her painting *Untitled #1298* 2009, (fig. 40) featuring a dog, the warm negative space is subtly varied. In *Untitled #1091* 2004 (fig 41) a girl's head with light falling from above is silhouetted against a dark ground that is green and varied. The empty space may be coloured and yet still convey a void-like space.

Fig. 40, Louise Hearman, *Untitled # 1298* 2009. oil on masonite, 61 x 61 cm

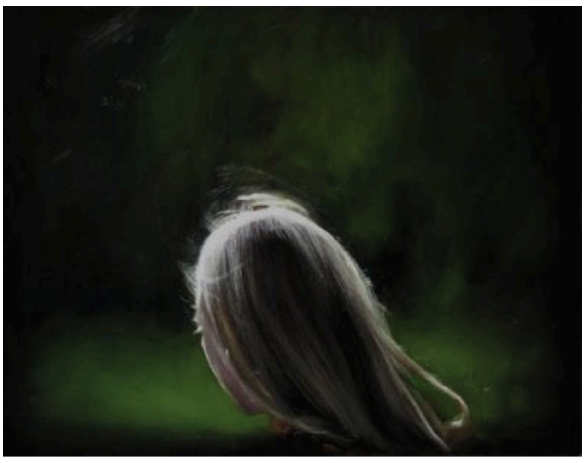

Fig. 41, Louise Hearman, *Untitled #1091* 2004, oil on masonite, size unavailable

Arauco Libre and black

The dark backgrounds in my suite of paintings reference the *Arauco Libre* band's experience of grief and injustice in their homeland. On their very first appearance at Salamanca Market the young members of the band all wore black. Mauricio Duarte (2017, pers.comm., 24 May) explained that it was their way of grieving for those who had been killed or disappeared under the Pinochet regime.

Similarly, the world famous *Nueve Cancion* band, *Quilapayun* ('the three bearded men' in the Mapuche language), exiled in France after the coup, have worn black throughout the fifty years of their existence. They formed in 1965 in the turbulent period before the election of the Allende government, protesting the plight of the working class (Shayne 2009). Their black ponchos, *mantas*, traditionally worn by Chilean peasants, were chosen to bring attention to the oppression and these *ponchos negros* became their trademark.

Fig. 42 The *Quilapayun* band, 2013

As well as grieving injustice, the dark background could be seen to convey the unknown faced by migrants in a strange country where the language and customs are different or my own struggle to understand the experience of others. In gravitating to a dark background to explore the migrant experience I may be drawing on my own memories of being an outsider. When I was a young teenager my parents moved interstate from a large city to a small country town. I did not want to leave my friends nor the only place I knew. In the new town I soon came to know the names of the local people and who they were, but I never felt accepted. Other boys had their existing networks and many were related. I joined sports teams and participated youth groups but went home alone. One dark New Year's Eve, the whole town gathered in the main street. I went down to join in. I walked the length of the street passing scores of people I knew and not one spoke to me. I felt they even turned away. Of course, they were oblivious to my feelings and this rejection only existed in my adolescent mind, but I have never forgotten the dejected feeling of walking home, through the trees, alone in the dark. It was a formative experience that has stood me in good stead in life. As I have been painting these dark grounds I have been reflecting on my own experience of being 'other'.

The light

In contrast with the dark backgrounds are the illuminated instruments. The play between light and dark which occurs in each of the works can be seen as evoking the many contrasts in the migrant experience such as those between despair and hope; nostalgia and contentment; past and future; expulsion and inclusion; sadness and happiness; loss and new beginnings. While the darkness conveys a

sense of the sorrows and trials arising from the exiles' past lives, the light that illuminates the instruments is suggestive of hope and optimism for a better future.

The raking light on the instruments can also be an invitation to make music - an invitation accepted by the members of *Arauco Libre* whose music opened doors when they settled down and made Hobart home. In the case of the Jewish exiles in Babylon referred to earlier, they moved on from the initial depression they felt as they wept and put their music aside. Their leaders advised them to be good citizens and participate in the society in which they now found themselves:

> Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

Likewise, for the Chilean exiles to Hobart such as Franco Solis, Tasmania proved to be a land of opportunity where he was able to fulfil his aspirations to go to university. In spite of financial hardship, he achieved this dream. The light of opportunity shone in the darkness of difficulty. An amateur musician, Franco joined *Arauco Libre* but soon left to work on his music craft. He returned with honed skills and imported instruments and made an invaluable contribution to the band and the Hobart community for many years.

In his essay 'Exile and Creativity' (2003), philosopher Vilem Flusser (1920-1991) a Czechoslovakian Jew whose family died in the Holocaust, interprets the exile situation as 'a challenge to creative activity'. Exiled to Brazil, Flusser says that instead of being 'engulfed by waves of exile' (p 104) the expelled person can turn the experience into one of creativity. The *Arauco Libre* members are fine examples of Flusser's optimism which is seen in the light that illuminates the instruments. This light sets up a contrast, a duality, with the dark backgrounds bringing tension, interest and intrigue to the work.

The instruments as portraits

Each painting, in depicting a single instrument is like a quasi-portrait standing in for the absent musician. The vertical format accentuates this reading of them as portraits. The images are staged. In each, the instrument is like a performer in the spotlight, claiming attention. This is one way that silent visual art can evoke musical performance. In the suite of paintings, each 'performer' is lit as if on stage, on show, intensifying this crossover between music and painting.

At the same time, the images are intended to be seen as a body, an ensemble of work. Hanging the images in a row, close to each other, references some of the characteristics of a musical ensemble. Band music is a group activity, a social interaction, and a musical co-operation where each instrument has a distinct role but submits to the whole in harmonious synergy. Andean ensembles in particular are about unity and playing together. They are not about solo performance or prima donnas. *Arauco Libre's* drummer, Michael Gonzalez, in an interview (2017, pers.comm., 10 November) highlighted the importance of

playing together, instruments 'talking to each other'. There was a harmony of minds and emotions that at times caused Michael to 'feel goose-bumps'. On the other hand, on the odd occasion when someone was out-of-sorts, the music would lack something. This intimacy was noted by the sound engineer when they made a recording. He was challenged as to how to mix the sound and retain this quality - that he succeeded is evident in the band's album *Mapuche*.

The suite of paintings is to be read as an ensemble (fig. 43) where each image enhances the other. While each painting interrogates the form of the instrument it portrays, they are united in a common format of the instrument being suspended in light against a dark background.

Fig. 43, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land* exhibition, April 2018

Suspended

As mentioned earlier the motif of instruments hanging from trees is connected with exile and is not intended to reference lynching or similar. As the images are to be viewed together, the way others hang minimises this interpretation. For example, the *bombo* (fig 44) hangs as from the shoulder of a musician. The hanging could, however, remind the viewer of a state of limbo, the uncertainty that a migrant may feel in an alien environment.

Fig. 44, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land #5,* oil on hardboard, 90 x 75 cm.

Fig. 45, Ron Wilson, *Serenade,* 2018, oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm.

Fig. 46, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land # 5*, 2018, oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm.

Comparing my experimental painting, *Serenade* 2018 (fig. 45) with *Song in a Strange Land #5,* 2018 (fig. 46), demonstrates how suspending the instrument is more potent and intriguing than merely leaning against a tree, more effectively conveying the idea of being in suspension between two cultures.

Close to nature

The association of the instruments with trees in the images is apt in another way besides the Australian connection. The traditional instruments evolved in environments and tribal cultures that were close to nature and this is reflected in their sound and the materials from which they are made.

The sound of the wind can be heard in the pan flutes. Bird-like sounds flow from the *quena* flutes and ocarinas, while the drums resonate with the beating of the heart. Today the flutes are made of bamboo and wood but archaeologists have found flutes made from bone, fired clay, reeds and even from the hollow shafts of a condor's wing feathers (Rueda 2012). Maracas were made from gourds hollowed out and filled with seeds or stones and the resulting swishing sound replicates sounds from the forest while an animal skin is stretched across the drums. All this demonstrates the closeness and integration of the music and nature.

The shell of an armadillo forms the sound chamber of a charango depicted in one of my works. Mauricio Duarte has one of these, in his collection of sixteen charangos, that was used from time to time in *Arauco Libre's* performances. The

Fig. 47, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land # 3*, oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm.

decision to include the image of the charango with the armadillo shell (fig. 47) is a considered one taking into account the sensitivities of the 21st century regarding animals. In 1996, measures were put in place prohibiting the hunting and trafficking of the quirquincho armadillo. Although in 2016 they were removed from the list of endangered species their survival is still threatened. (Lacourarie 2017). Notwithstanding all this, the image of this instrument is integral to the suite of paintings, as it is a reminder that the music being celebrated is derived from folk music rooted in a tribal past. The preserved skin of the armadillo as the sound chamber of this chordophone takes us to a world of ponchos and folk dance just as surely as the classic lines of the violin and cello transport us to a world of bow ties, concertos and symphonies.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced my studio journey and how the suite of paintings evolved. I have included reflections on the decisions made in the studio, including the discovery of hanging instruments as a trope of exile. The stimulus and instruction of the work of other artists is evidenced in the way the work

progressed. Assessing whether my work has been successful in resolving the research question is the subject of the concluding chapter.

CONCLUSION

The outcome of the research question, 'How to express, in visual form, the music of *Arauco Libre* and its role in their migration experience,' is an ensemble of nine still life paintings which use a transhistorical account of allegory (harp in the willows) reinvigorated in a different time and place for a different cultural experience of diaspora and recovery.

The project makes a contribution to the field by reinterpreting the traditional meaning of musical instruments in the still life genre to address contemporary issues such as the experience of cultural displacement. In the Dutch *vanitas* and *memento mori* still life paintings of the seventeenth century objects were used to convey a religious message: *all is vanity.* Musical instruments in particular were used as symbols of the futility of worldly pleasures and as allegories of the transience of life which passes like a song that is sung. My images repurpose the genre. The South American musical instruments, embedded with rich associations of history and culture, are quasi-portraits of their owners, forming a contemporary allegory of music and migration, resonating with one of the most important issues of our time, the integration of displaced people.

In focussing on objects of another culture, my project highlights the potential of the still life genre, traditionally Eurocentric, for cross-cultural dialogue. In the Dutch still life practice, especially in the ostentatious *pronkstilleven* tradition, 'exotic' objects were displayed in an ethnocentric way, as objects of curiosity, spoils of colonial endeavour (Bryson 1990, p 126). This project presents the Amerindian cultural objects (the musical instruments) in their own right,

without condescension or judgment. This bears out my contention in the Introduction that an outsider can provide a sympathetic depiction of another culture by entering into the world view of the participants of that culture. The interviews with band members were crucial to my appreciation of the meanings which these instruments and the music they produced had in their original culture.

The work developed the pictorial device of hanging musical instruments as a symbol for exile. I found that when objects are suspended in an image they function differently than when grounded on a table or similar. They attract more scrutiny and appear more vulnerable. The idea of exiles being in limbo between two cultures, two countries, not belonging to one or the other, is fostered by this trope. The eucalyptus trees from which they hang are metaphors for the refugees' strange new land, Australia. This trope of exile, along with the dualism of the dark void and the raking light, combine in a redemptive visual narrative of hope and human endeavour. The allegorical approach serves to broaden the significance of the project. While it is rooted in a particular instance of cross-cultural dialogue, the lack of specificity of the backgrounds enables the images to serve more generally as allegories of cultural displacement.

While this project has examined, and documented, a small but significant part of Hobart history that is in danger of being lost, it also has broader significance insofar as it highlights how the arts – whether in the form of music or painting – have the ability to communicate experiences across cultural borders in the absence of a common spoken language. The work also emphasises the

important role music plays in maintaining cultural identity. Responding to the specific case of *Arauco Libre*, this body of work suggests that the creative arts, music in particular, can have a positive role to play in integrating into a new country and culture. This was certainly endorsed by the response my works received when exhibited in April 2018 at Salamanca Arts Centre, near the place of *Arauco Libre's* performances. The Exhibition was attended by many, including the members of the band and their families. They expressed appreciation of the acknowledgement and recognition the project has afforded them and said they were very comfortable with the way their story had been presented. During the exhibition, three band members gave a concert in the resonant ambience of the gallery to a very appreciative audience.

Fig. 48, *Arauco Libre* perform at the exhibition, *Song in a Strange Land*, Salamanca Arts Centre, April 2018

There is room for further studio research into how rejuvenated still life can promote cross-cultural dialogue in our pluralistic society. There is scope for exploring the potential of eloquent objects to address issues of identity and inclusion; for investigating new ways of envisaging objects associated with the

traditions and history of other lands, that encapsulate a culture and a world view, but seen in a new multicultural context. Not only cultural objects but other cultural art forms, like music, also offer a rich opportunity to explore how the visual arts can probe ways the arts can bring people together.

Fig. 49, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land, #4,* 2018*,* oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm

Fig. 50, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land, #2,* 2018*,* oil on hardboard, 105 x 60 cm

Fig. 51, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land, #3,* 2018*,* oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm

Fig. 52, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land, #4,* 2018*,* oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm

Fig. 53, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land, #5,* 2018*,* oil on hardboard, 90 x 74 cm

Fig. 54, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land, #6,* 2018*,* oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm

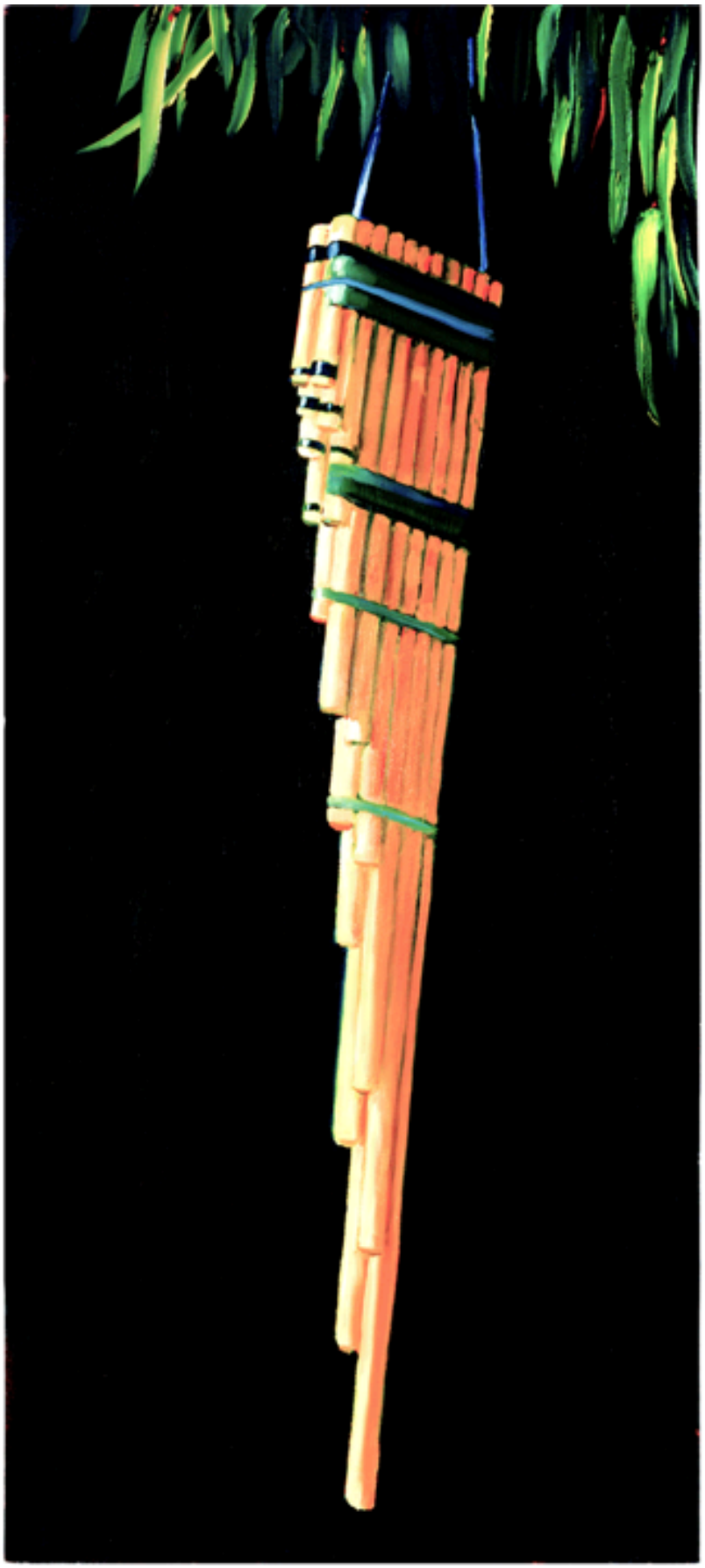

Fig. 55, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land, #7,* 2018*,* oil on hardboard,110 x 50 cm

Fig. 56, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land, #8,* 2018*,* oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm

Fig. 57, Ron Wilson, *Song in a Strange Land, #9,* 2018*,* oil on hardboard, 90 x 60 cm

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